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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003156

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KTER](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: BOMBS AT TIKRIT UNIVERSITY
SIGNAL TILT AGAINST INSURGENCY?

Classified By: PRT Team Leader David Stewart for reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (U) This is a Salah Ad Din Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

[¶2.](#) (C) SUMMARY The normally quiet University of Tikrit experienced two bomb incidents on November 22 and 23. In the past, this would have sent students and professors scurrying away from any American contact. Yet, just hours after the first incident, university deans met at the campus, main library with the PDoff, the economic team met with accounting professors, and students were visiting the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)-sponsored study abroad center. Conversations with senior University officials indicated they would not be deterred by terrorist threats. The motivation for these scare tactics and the response of the University offer one clear message: change is underway at an institution once regarded as sympathetic to terrorists and insurgents.
END SUMMARY

[¶3.](#) (U) The University of Tikrit, located just north of Tikrit city limits, was off limits to the U.S. for much of the past 18 months. According to military analysts, insurgents used it as base of operations, launching mortar rounds on to the nearby American base and actively recruiting on campus. The university community did not want to engage with Americans. Within the last year, however, we have seen the University administration change course and embrace active partnership with the PRT, Coalition Forces, and American universities. Now students and professors alike welcome American soldiers to campus for English lessons and informal chats and the administration is pursuing partnerships with six American universities. The PRT Team Leader has also begun teaching a monthly course at the College of Education. One sign of increasing freedoms on campus occurred during the first class, when a female student publicly challenged her Baathist professor's proposal. Only days ago the President of the University extended the first invitation to American officials to dine at his home, and the following day he traveled to Baghdad to meet with the Minister Counselor for Public Affairs.

[¶4.](#) (C) But on the morning of November 22 a bomb exploded along the main avenue of the sprawling campus. No significant damage was reported. When PRToffs arrived around 11 AM at the University's central library (located only a few meters away from the site of the bomb), activity appeared to be normal and the library was filled with students. PRToffs visited the Study Abroad Center and conducted several meetings over the course of the next four hours. No one mentioned the incident, nor did they seem alarmed. To the contrary, students approached PRT members in front of their peers to inquire about study opportunities in the United States--this on a campus where, until recently, even speaking to an American was cause for retaliation. Student Mustafa Tawfiq (strictly protect), for example, told PRToffs that after he expressed interest in the Fulbright program earlier

this year he received a text message telling him to stay away from the Americans on campus.

¶15. (C) A flier claiming credit for the attack said it was in retaliation for the increasing "corruption" of the students at the University, specifically citing the more revealing clothing that women have been wearing and "cooperation with the occupiers." (Note: PRToffs traveling to the University on a regular basis have observed that student attire, particularly for women, has gradually become more relaxed over the past year. End Note.) Military analysts have Qover the past year. End Note.) Military analysts have determined that the flier itself was likely written by someone without a college education and bears the hallmarks of Al Qaeda, suggesting that the attack probably did not originate from University students or professors.

¶16. (C) Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) conducted a search of the campus and discovered another bomb hidden in a trash can in front of the President's office plus a cache of more explosive devices in a separate area. Conversations with senior University officials indicated they would not be deterred by terrorist threats. A senior advisor to the University President insisted that the PRT continue with student-soldier chats and TOEFL classes scheduled for the following day, but Coalition Forces (CF) decided to cancel them as a precautionary measure. Other University officials with whom the PRT spoke echoed these sentiments, saying that their programs with Americans would not be deterred by these incidents.

¶17. (C) COMMENT: Instead of serving as an ominous sign of a continuing strong insurgency at the campus, placement of

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these devices may instead be the mark of a marginalized extremist movement. Not so long ago, letters, threats, or phone calls sufficed to intimidate students or professors. Radical and criminal elements used to operate with impunity--but times appear to be changing. This emerging openness to risk engaging with Americans may be forcing these actors to resort to more desperate measures. Despite these attacks, however, University of Tikrit students and administrators alike appear to have made a conscious decision to reconnect with the world from which they have been cut off for so long. PRT and Brigade strongly believe these changing attitudes need to be encouraged and supported. END COMMENT.
HILL